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# U.S. clumsy handling journalist 'spy' case

Were its implications in Moscow and other world capitals not so serious, the U.S. State Department's expulsion of a Soviet journalist in overnight retaliation for the Soviet Union's expulsion of an American one would be comical.

The central figures in this little noticed drama are Associated Press correspondent George Krinsky, who had been working in Moscow, and Vladimir Alekseyev, Washington correspondent for the Soviet news agency, Tass.

Late last week — officially the word came down on Saturday — Krinsky was given his walking papers — a week to get out of the Soviet Union. Rightly or wrongly, the Soviet branded Krinsky a U.S. intelligence agent. And also, just to make the charge stick, that he had been involved in illegal currency operations with Soviet citizens.

Krinsky, of course, denied those charges.

By Sunday, a matter of hours later, our State Department ordered Alekseyev expelled. Same orders. Pack and leave the U.S. within a week.

What's wrong with this? Very simple. This kind of overt over-reaction by the State Department makes it appear that our newsmen work for our government — including the role of spies.

Mr. Krinsky was ousted from the Soviet Union because he was believed to be in undercover work of some sort. No such explanation accompanied Alekseyev's ouster. It looks simply like pure tit-for-tat retaliation.

This kind of thing deeply troubles those of us in the news business. Doubly so, irrespective of the validity of the Soviet charges against the AP correspondent, because there is current history on the record that our government has used newsmen to do spy work in foreign countries.

That very subject has been a sore spot with a number of American press groups — including the National Conference of Editorial Writers. It has been at sword's point with the CIA for a number of months over this issue — the prostituting of American journalists for work best left to professionals at the cloak-and-dagger trade.

Washington's reaction does create the impression abroad, and even at home, that our reporters are somehow part of our government — which has to respond if something done to limit their reporting.

If Alekseyev was a Russian spy, then he should have been booted out long ago. As near as we read it, he was kicked out pro-forma simply because Krinsky was. We don't look good on this one. And American journalism abroad loses credibility.

We may not appreciate the harassment Krinsky reportedly has been subject to of late as an "unwelcome" reporter, but counter action such as that taken by our State Department doesn't help matters.

Not only does it make other American newsmen abroad suspect and targets for similar reprisal, it merely hands the Soviets another opening for a propaganda barrage. Just as we could accuse them of violating the Helsinki agreements, now they are accusing of us of doing the same by expelling Alekseyev without good cause.

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